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News Release



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Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Provides Economic Benefits Today, Conservation Benefits for Future Generations

Columbia National Wildlife Refuge generated \$5,149,800 in total economic activity related to refuge recreational use and generated 72 jobs for the nearby community of Othello, Washington, according to Banking on Nature 2004: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation. The same report, issued during National Wildlife Refuge Week, found that national wildlife refuges are major economic engines for communities, putting almost \$1.4 billion into the economy.

Columbia National Wildlife Refuge generated nearly eight dollars for every dollar received for the refuge's operations and maintenance costs last fiscal year. Nationally, the \$1.4 billion in total economic activity related to national wildlife refuge recreational use is nearly four times the \$391 million that the Refuge System received in fiscal year 2004 for operations and maintenance.

Moreover, the National Wildlife Refuge System created nearly 24,000 private sector jobs as the \$1.4 billion flowed through the economy, generating about \$454 million in employment income. Additionally, recreational spending on national wildlife refuges generated nearly \$151 million in tax revenue at the local, county, state and federal level.

The national report details findings from 93 national wildlife refuges, including Columbia. The National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses nearly 100 million acres and 545 national wildlife refuges. The Banking on Nature 2004 study included money spent for food and refreshments, lodging at motels, cabins, lodges or campgrounds, and transportation when it calculated the total economic activity related to refuge recreational use.

Columbia NWR had 67,971 visitors in 2004. Refuge visitors enjoyed a variety of activities including hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing. About 69 percent of recreation visits were undertaken by people living outside the local area.

"Columbia National Wildlife Refuge is proud of our role in strengthening the health and well-being of the community. We not only provide an economic benefit for our citizens today, but national wildlife refuges also ensure benefits to future generations as we conserve the natural resources that are the foundation of our life and our heritage," said Refuge Manager, Bob Flores. "We invite everyone to visit the refuge this week and in the future to learn about our wildlife and outdoor recreation programs."

A project feature of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project the 30,000 acre Columbia National Wildlife Refuge was designated in April of 1943. A landscape carved by the Ice Aged Floods with it's abundance of lakes and wetlands developed since the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project has become a destination for recreationist throughout the State. The area offers walking trails, a canoe trail and abundant fishing and hunting opportunities.

"Columbia National Wildlife Refuge is a wonderful place to spend a day outdoors. I am proud to volunteer my time to support the refuge and love bringing children of the community to see the wildlife during the Environmental Education Programs given in the spring," said Margaret Schiffner, a Moses Lake resident and member of the Audubon Refuge Keepers, Columbia Basin Audubon.

The Othello Sandhill Crane Festival is slated for March 25 and 26, 2005. The festival will feature guided tours, lecture series, children's activities and banquet. Many of these activities will involve the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge. During National Wildlife Refuge Week, celebrated October 9-15, wildlife refuges will feature a number of special events, festivals and environmental education programs. Columbia National Wildlife Refuge will be hosting their "Sunset Tours" that highlight the refuge's beautiful landscape. Additional information, including a list of selected events, is available online at <http://refuges.fws.gov/>

For more information about Refuges in the Pacific Region, go to <http://pacific.fws.gov>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.